

Homily - the prodigal son

Psalms 34, Joshua 5:9 - 12, 2 Cor. 5:17 - 21, Luke 15:1 - 3, 11 - 32

Theme:

Lent - reconciliation

Introduction:

In a world increasingly marked by polarization and the tendency to dismiss individuals based solely on their opinions, the church must shine a light and testify in a different manner. It is essential to recognize the person behind the opinion, action, or what we may consider wrong behavior. This understanding and empathy are fundamental to our faith, as we believe that Jesus came to save us sinners. Salvation occurs within the tension of a relationship, not through the rejection of someone who holds a different opinion.

Transition & Question:

The story of the prodigal son is one that many people are familiar with, whether from the biblical account or from real-life experiences. How often do we find ourselves going through a similar process if we take the time to reflect on our lives? Anyone who has experienced forgiveness and reconciliation understands what I'm talking about. I see myself in this story—not just as a "minor point to make in a homily," but as someone who genuinely relates to this journey, which has been, and continues to be, my own.

Intro extended

Isn't this why we cling to Christ and identify as Christians? We have hope that, despite our sins and shortcomings, there will be a kind face waiting to greet us when we look up from our stress, isolation, hunger, despair, and pain. Isn't this what we seek in our relationships and friendships: someone who cares about us even when we fail or disappoint? This hope assures us that we remain valuable as human persons, not just because of what we contribute or how we behave, but because we hold worth even with differing opinions. There is something more to life than the strict formula of "If you do this, I will do that."

The process of salvation through a relationship with Christ reveals a deeper understanding of life. Let's explore that process, marked by the powerful symbols in the story that connect us to the divine and to one another.

The robe.

In the story, the Father demonstrates what it means to have a "more than transactional inheritance." His response to the prodigal son is not only excessive but also legally inappropriate and humiliating. He challenges cultural traditions by running to greet his son, despite the son's clear failure to manage the inheritance he was given. The son did not adopt his father's values or beliefs. After running to his son, the Father places not just any robe, but the best robe on him. The significance of the best robe symbolizes the righteousness we receive through baptism and the restoration of our identity. We are clothed in Christ, who covers our nakedness and shame. Christ serves as our cover and appeasement (hilasterion) before the Father.

2. The ring and sandals.

The Father places a ring on his finger, symbolizing the eternal covenant that God has made to save His people and bless His inheritance. This signet ring represents our origins and signifies to whom we belong. Christ fulfills this covenant, the law, and the essence of time. The son receives sandals, which indicate that we can now walk in accordance with the gospel. We are called to share this good news with the world without becoming part of it. Christ, the Word (Logos) is the good news for a broken world.

3. The fatted calf.

In addition to making his son feel welcome, safe, and at home with the robe, the ring and the sandals, the Father orders the fatted calf to be slaughtered and a feast to ensue. A more accurate translation of this phrase would be "a bull calf formed from wheat," indicating that this is a sacrificial offering of the highest value. Such an animal comes at a great expense, serving as a narrative device to illustrate Jesus as the most costly sacrifice. While repentance is important, it does not lead to full reconciliation and communion; there is a cost involved in order to begin the feast of communion, and that cost has been provided for us. Christ is the one sacrifice we need.

In this story, Christ is symbolized by the robe, the ring, the sandals, and the fatted calf for those who wish to see.

The older brother - conclusion:

The complexity of the narrative deepens when we meet the older brother. Bitter and jealous of the Father's generosity and love toward

his younger brother, he resents his father's behavior. While the brother worked in the field, he was not in a faraway land. He refuses to attend the feast, comparing his life to that of his brother and concluding that he does not want to be part of that relationship. Although he claims that he has never transgressed any command, this assertion does not necessarily make it true; he simply fails to recognize his own shortcomings.

Despite the older brother's self-righteousness and strong opinions, the Father does not respond with judgment. Instead, he says, "You will always be with me; everything I have is yours. It is right for us to be glad and celebrate because your brother was dead and is alive again." The Father extends generous, patient, and kind hospitality to his older son, encouraging him to join in the joy of redemption, despite his judgmental attitudes.

Sometimes, we judge those who appear righteous or pious. They may seem to have it all together, but we know there are things beneath the surface that they must confront. Much of our salvation and spiritual growth involves learning to embody the Father's patient perspective—to recognize that His kingdom is not distant from those we consider "self-righteous." We often lack understanding of where people truly are in their journeys, yet it seems that God is willing to extend His hospitality to those struggling with judgments and comparisons. This is very good news because we all engage in such comparisons, to varying degrees.

It is significant that the parable of the older brother ends without a final judgment; the story remains open-ended. May we choose to withhold final judgments as well and remain open to the possibility of salvation for all.

Wednesday, March 26, 2025